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ABSTRACT

An undergraduate internship program in the geography department at Wittenberg University, Ohio, is described. During the late 1960s and early 1970s all vocational-type programs at Wittenberg were eliminated except those within education and business departments. However, members of the geography department recently decided to incorporate a field-experience component so that students would be adequately prepared to enter the rapidly changing vocational, technical world. Geography internships were developed in areas of urban planning, cartography, environmental protection, and social action. As a first step, students discuss possible programs with a faculty advisor, meet with former interns, and then contact potential sponsors. Taken as one-third of the academic load, the internships are for one-term duration and cannot be for pay. Students spend between 10 and 15 hours per week on the job. Student evaluation is done weekly by the faculty advisor in consultation with the supervisor at the sponsoring agency. Formal evaluation is based on a required written work diary. Program evaluation involves an informal system of reports by the interns and their supervisors. Two benefits of the internship program have been identified: students benefit from their exposure to the real problems facing community agencies, and graduates entering the job market feel their internships have made them stronger competitors for employment. (AV)

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INTERNSHIPS FOR THE UNDERGRADUATE MAJOR AT THE LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE

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A paper prepared for presentation at the Annual Meeting of the National Council for Geographic Education

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Introduction: During recent years undergraduate students have developed a new concern for practicality. They are no longer willing to accept the traditional liberal arts colleges' cavalier attitude toward careers. So long as jobs were available, often merely due to the fact one possessed a B.A. degree, we were not pressured by our students or graduates to consider the applicability of our courses. We were allowed to proceed merrily along the paths of intellectual awareness, sensitivity, creativity, striving to produce the well rounded generalist.

However, as the job market became increasingly tight during the early years of this decade our students began to reflect some of the posture of their peers in the magauniversities and vocational colleges. In short, our students became job oriented and thus started our department on a self examination in which we began to look at the "fitness" of our traditional program, particularly regarding the constraints of the employment world in which our students were going to be competing. We were aware that prior to our evaluation period state universities and colleges had felt the need to develop internships to make their programs more practical. Student response to these was positive as Heiges states, "students value an internship program...because of the practical experience gained...and for the opportunity to apply scholastic theories to real situation." (Heiges, 147) However, much of what our predecessors had worked out was not directly applicable to our institution.

Background: Wittenberg University was established in 1845 by the Lutheran Church, its Liberal Arts College has over the years developed

into a four year institution stressing the academic. It's stated fundamental purpose is, "to help educate the creative minority of a civilization."

During the early sixties a concentration on the traditional liberal arts was instituted. The past decade has seen the deletion of all remaining vocational type programs, (typing and secretarial skill courses were dropped in the early 1960's, engineering drafting in the early 70's). This purity stance was carried so far as to question the validity of Education and Business departments within a Liberal Arts College. They were viewed, by some, as being "too vocationally oriented" and while it was never openly suggested that they be closed (their large student numbers probably protected them) there existed a strong feeling that the institution should resist any movement toward purely career training or vocational type courses. This "climate" played a significant role in determining the manner of response which our department felt it could make to the student's perceived needs concerning practical experience.

During the early 70's approximately half of our graduates were entering the job market directly following graduation. We, as a department, felt that if one of the functions of education is to prepare students to deal with demands of the future then our preparation model must take into account the rapidly changing vocational, technical world. (Altman,56-60) A careful evaluation of our major, which was originally designed to fit within "the liberal arts curriculum" exposed a heavy bias toward the acquisition of a standard

body of knowledge. After an exhaustive evaluation we were convinced that some changes would be beneficial. Our decision was to add specific tool methodology courses and field experience in the form of internships. In addition we decided on a reduction in the number of regional courses. This paper reports on the process of developing our internship program and describes the benefits we feel our students receive from that program.

Obstacles: Our first hurdle was to construct a method for providing academic credit. As a department we felt it unrealistic to expect students to participate without credit. Theoretically, as Corey and Stuart suggest, there are several course credit possibilities, however, given our institutional constraints, we were forced to go the route of the "Independent Study." While this did not turn out to be a serious barrier we would have preferred an internship course which would at the very least have been more explicit on the student's transcript.

The Wittenberg system for "new" course approval consists of two layers, approval must first be acquired by the Educational Policies Committee which has as one of its charges the controlling of course proliferation. The EPC committee then forwards the proposal to its parent body, the College Council, where final approval or disapproval is voted. Believing discretion to be the better part of valor we choose not to attempt a frontal attack and have quietly and happily administered a wide selection of internships to the majority of our students.

Program Description: Internships at Wittenberg are for one term duration (11 weeks) and cannot be for pay. They are taken as one-third of the academic load. Thus students are taking two additional courses on campus at the same time. Credit is one course unit (Wittenberg is not on an hour basis). We have found 10-15 hours of work per week to be appropriate. Fewer than 10 hours is not meaningful to the agency and 15 is about maximum, considering the student's other academic commitments.

The first step in our program is for the student to seek a faculty advisor, together they discuss the possibilities of either one of our existing programs or a program of their own design. If the former is chosen the next step is for the prospective internee to discuss the desired program with a student who has already participated under that sponsor. If the latter (new program) then the next step is to contact the sponsor, this is done first by the faculty advisor and if the sponsor is agreeable, an interview is arranged with the student. In the case of existing programs, the student contacts the sponsor directly after obtaining the faculty advisor's consent and meeting with a former intern.

Student Evaluation: This is done by the faculty advisor, in consultation with the supervisor at the sponsoring agency. The specifics vary among faculty members but in general both informal and formal techniques are utilized. Weekly meetings are a general requirement, thus allowing the faculty advisor an input opportunity. The formal

evaluation is based on a required written work diary. This latter is a written record of all job assignments, particularly as to types of experiences, and the intensity and nature of the work activities. This written record is kept in the nature of a log with a summary essay to be written at the completion of the internship, prior to course evaluation.

Internship Programs: Our first internships were quite diverse, a feature which we have attempted to maintain. The department solicited one position on a rotating basis with a cartographer at the City Planning Office. A senior major developed one at a nearby Audobon nature center while another major established hers with "Metro ministry," where she served as a social research analyst doing basic demographic work. Thus we were launched into the world of practical education. We presently have programs in four general areas: environmental, urban planning, Cartography and for want of a better term, social action. Environmental possibilities exist with the city education system's environmentalist, the above mentioned Audobon Societies nature center plus other regional nature centers and state parks.

In urban planning we can utilize both the city and county planning offices. Cartography (our most popular area) is, at present, limited to the city planning office.

In the area of social action we have possibilities with Metro Ministry, Planned Parenthood and the Ohio Institute for Appropriate Technology.

Program Evaluation: At present we have a very informal system. At completion each intern is quizzed by the faculty advisor as to the benefit(s) of his experience with the sponsoring agency. In addition, the faculty advisor maintains close contact with the supervisor. To date only a few agencies have been dropped. It is quite possible however that we may be forced by increased participation to adopt a more rigorous method of evaluation.

Benefits: While several could be listed, two have clearly been most significant. First, our students benefit from their exposure to the real problems facing our community agencies. This "real-world" experience has proven a valuable input for their career/graduate school decision making process. In essence they have the opportunity of trying out a career with minimal long-term commitment. Secondly, those entering directly into the job market feel their internships have provided them with an invaluable plus factor regarding the competition for employment. Some of our students have been informed that their internship was the deciding factor in their having been employed.

In summary, we feel the internship program has been well worth our collective effort, moreover that it is compatible with both our institution's liberal arts orientation and our department's perceived need to provide practical, real-world experience.

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